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AUTHOR Page, Jane; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A research study of 300 Georgia first-year school teachers sought: (1) to identify first-year teachers' perceptions of their undergraduate education curricula; (2) to determine whether significant differences in perceptions exist among groups of first-year teachers categorized on the basis of background information; and (3) to determine which variables are most predictive of first-year teachers' decisions to continue as classroom teachers. A survey containing both controlled-choice and open-ended items was the basis for the study's results. Three statistical procedures were used in analyzing the data. Major findings include: (1) A large majority of Georgia first-year teachers are female (87.1 percent), white (89.2 percent), and in their early 20s (66 percent); (2) A majority of the subjects (63.2 percent) plan to remain as classroom teachers; (3) A large majority (at least 80 percent) of teachers perceived their preparation as good or excellent in 10 specific areas; and (4) Females', Blacks' and young teachers' perceptions of certain aspects of their preparation were significantly more positive than were perceptions of males, whites, and older first-year teachers. Thirteen tables are appended. (JM)

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Teacher Education Curricula: Perceptions of First-Year Teachers

Jane Page
Fred Page
Steven Million
Georgia Southern College

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The research study is an ex post facto analysis of first-year teachers' perceptions of their undergraduate teacher education curricula.

Problem Statement

The problem of the study is three-fold: (1) to identify first-year teachers' perceptions of their undergraduate teacher education curricula, (2) to determine whether significant differences in perceptions exist among groups of first-year teachers categorized on the basis of background information, and (3) to determine which variables are most predictive of first-year teachers' decisions to continue as classroom teachers.

Significance of the Research

Georgia State Department of Education officials report that two out of three teachers in Georgia leave the profession within their first three years of service. Combined with other factors, such as lower teacher education enrollments and increased specialized programs in public schools, the teacher dropout problem has led to a severe teacher shortage in Georgia. The State began the 1981-82 academic year with a deficit of three hundred teachers.

Other studies conducted by Georgia Southern Faculty (see Literature Citations) have revealed problems perceived by high school seniors, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers related to the teaching profession. Some frustrations identified by these individuals can be ameliorated by raising salaries or lowering teacher-pupil ratios. However, many of the identified frustrations can be associated with a lack of knowledge and skills needed for success in teaching.

The State of Georgia has made a concerted effort to help teachers improve through the implementation of the "Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument." Beginning teachers are evaluated and given suggestions for improvement. Those unable to meet these teaching objectives by the end of the third year are not granted permanent certification. Therefore, teachers entering the profession without perceiving themselves adequately prepared have experienced anxiety related to the assessment.

Individual colleges and schools of education in Georgia continually attempt to upgrade their curricula through self-study procedures. Information regarding specific areas of the teacher education curriculum, as perceived by first-year teachers, could be significantly beneficial to these institutions in their efforts to improve teacher preparation opportunities.

LITERATURE CITATIONS

Literature related to the increasing need for teachers in Georgia includes research projects completed by the Darden Research Corporation (1981) and Page, et. al., (1981, 1982, 1983). Some of the conclusions of these studies are listed below.

1. A primary problem in the public school system is the school administration (Darden, 1981).

2. A determining factor in whether high school seniors choose teaching as a future career is in part a reflection of whether they have discussed this career possibility with any other person (Page, et. al., 1981).

3. Females and Blacks generally view the teaching profession in a more positive manner than do others (Page, et. al., 1981, 1982, 1983).

4. Encouraging factors related to teaching as identified by high school seniors, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers include: contribution to humanity, job security, and fringe benefits (Page, et. al., 1981, 1982, 1983).

5. Major discouraging factors identified by high school seniors, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers include salary, discipline problems, and working conditions (Page, et. al., 1981, 1982, 1983).

Literature related to the improvement of teacher education curriculum published in recent years includes studies done in Kentucky, Ohio, Alabama, and Indiana. Summary descriptions of these studies are included.

Middleton and Cohen (1979) surveyed 200 randomly selected teacher education graduates from the University of Kentucky during their first or second year of teaching. Data from their rating scale was used to determine problem and non-problem areas.

Dickson (1979) discusses a ten-year research and development effort in Ohio. This project has brought the university, public and parochial schools, and the community into coalitions to train pre-service and in-service teachers.

Krajewski and others (1979) describe research at Auburn University in which 641 first-year teachers in Alabama were asked to help identify areas in their teacher-education program "core" which they believed needed improvement. In educational organization, administration, and financing, the survey revealed that four topic areas were principal concerns of new teachers:

1. The structure of public education
2. The roles and functions of school personnel
3. The law and public education
4. The financing of public education

Elliot and Steinkeller (1979) interviewed 40 randomly selected second-year teachers in Indiana regarding their preparation program. Three areas of serious need or weakness were cited.

> One, the teachers need more knowledge about normal behavior in children as it relates to discipline and behavior management in the broad sense. Two, the teachers need a better reality base as to what the schools actually are and can do. Three, the teachers need to be able to transfer to the classroom more of teaching methods skills, particularly those which deal with management of time and materials.

The review of these and other related studies guided the researchers in developing the instrument included in the research.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects of the Study

Drawing from data received September 28, 1981 provided by the Operational Systems Support Section of the Office of Administrative Services of the Georgia Department of Education, the researchers randomly selected three hundred first-year public school teachers from all school districts in the State and invited their participation in this study.

Data Gathering Instrument

The instrument "A Curricular Efficacy Survey" was used to ascertain information for this study. Thirteen controlled-choice items on the instrument solicited background from the selected first-year teachers. In addition, twenty-five controlled-choice items and three open-ended items appeared in the instrument and were designed to yield information regarding the first-year teachers' perceptions of their teacher-training curricula.

Methods of Analysis

Three statistical procedures were used in analyzing the data. (1) Frequency distributions were used for identification of background information and perceptions. (2) Analyses of variance were computed to determine whether significant differences among groups of first-year teachers existed on individual items at the .05 level of significance. (3) Discriminant analyses were employed to determine which variables are most predictive of first-year teachers' decisions to continue as classroom teachers.

FINDINGS

Specific findings are included on Tables I-XIII. Major findings include the following:

(1) A large majority of Georgia first-year teachers are female (87.1%), white (89.2%) and in their early twenties (66%).

(2) First-year teachers have considerably higher grade point averages for education courses than they do for overall undergraduate work.

(3) Nearly half (47.8%) of first-year teachers entered college as education majors.

(4) A majority of the subjects (63.2%) plan to remain as classroom teachers.

(5) A large majority (at least 80%) of first-year teachers perceived their preparation as good or excellent in the following areas:

a. To identify and compose instructional objectives for use with students
b. To plan instruction designed to achieve objectives
c. To use oral reinforcement techniques with students
d. To use a variety of teaching methods
e. To work with individuals and small groups
f. To work with large groups
g. To understand and use the assigned subject matter

h. To create an attractive and orderly environment
i. To communicate enthusiasm for learning
j. To assist learners in developing a positive self concept

(6) A large number (at least 40%) of the subjects perceived their preparation as fair or poor in the following areas:

a. To manage student classroom behavior
b. To understand the roles of other educational personnel (including principals, supervisors, counselors, etc.)
c. To work with parents in the teaching-learning process
d. To understand the legal responsibilities of teachers
e. To understand public school organization

(7) Females', Blacks', and young teachers' perceptions of certain aspects of their preparation were significantly more positive than perceptions of males, whites, and older first-year teachers.

(8) First-year teachers that entered college as education majors or made only one change of major were more positive in their perceptions of ten aspects of their preparation.

(9) Teachers with higher student grade point averages were more satisified with their preparation.

(10) Seventeen variables combined to predict with a 79% accuracy whether first-year teachers plan to remain in the teaching profession. Included were ten items related to the subjects' assessment of quality of preparation. These consist of the following:

a. To select and use proper questioning techniques
b. To evaluate teaching effectiveness and make curricular revisions when necessary
c. To use instructional time efficiently
d. To understand the roles of other educational personnel
e. To assist learners in developing a positive self concept
f. To work with parents in the teaching-learning process
g. To work with large groups
h. To work with individuals and small groups
i. To communicate enthusiasm for learning
j. To understand and use appropriate subject matter

(11) Thirty-seven percent of the subjects responded in an open-ended comment section that they would like to have had more field experiences in their undergraduate preparation.

(12) Twenty-two percent of the subjects stated in the open-ended section that they need more preparation in behavior management techniques.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Based on findings of this study, first-year teachers in Georgia are generally satisfied with particular areas of their undergraduate teacher education curricula. However, results also indicate possible implications and recommendations for improving teacher preparation.

Some of the major implications for consideration are:

1. Designers of curricula for teacher education programs need to place greater emphasis on public school organization, legal responsibilities, parenting, and discipline;
2. Recruitment in high schools of collegiate teacher education majors should be continued and increased, since students entering college as education majors indicate a better preparedness for teaching;
3. Entrance requirements for teacher education programs should be upgraded, since teachers with higher grade point averages indicated that they were better prepared to fulfill their teaching responsibilities;
4. Variables which are predictive of teachers' plans to continue in the profession should be emphasized in teacher education programs;
5. An increase in field-based experiences should provide an increase in level of preparation;
6. Areas which are perceived as inadequate in undergraduate programs should be emphasized in in-service and graduate offerings.

Feedback is only as beneficial as its utilization. Results of this study provide specific curriculum concerns of first-year practitioners in relation to their undergraduate preparation. These and similar feedback provisions offer bases for teacher preparation curriculum revisions.

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TABLE I

FREQUENCY TABULATIONS FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Variable	Category	Percentage
Sex	Female	87.1
	Male	12.9
Race	Caucasion	89.2
	Negro	9.7
	Other	1.1
Age	19-21	.5
	22-25	65.5
	26-30	15.6
	31-35	6.5
	36-40	6.5
	41 and older	5.4
Pattern in Establishing Major	Entered and remained ed. majors	44.0
	Entered as "undecided" and changed to education	9.8
	Entered as other major and changed to education	23.4
	Entered as ed. major, changed to a different major then returned to education	3.8
	Changed majors two or more times and then changed to education	6.5
	Other	12.5
Estimated Undergraduate Grade Point Average	2.0 - 2.4	2.7
	2.5 - 2.9	25.5
	3.0 - 3.4	35.4
	3.5 - 3.9	34.2
	4.0	1.6
Grade Point Average for Education courses	2.0 - 2.4	1.1
	2.5 - 2.9	6.5
	3.0 - 3.4	28.9
	3.5 - 3.9	52.8
	4.0	10.6

Variable	Category	Percentage
Grade Point Average for Graduate Courses (40.3% of subjects had taken at least one graduate course)	1.5 - 1.9	1.3
	2.5 - 2.9	5.3
	3.0 - 3.4	22.7
	3.5 - 3.9	30.7
	4.0	40
Degrees Held	B.S. Ed.	64.5
	B.S.	14
	B.A.	11.8
	B.B.A.	0
	M.Ed.	7.5
	M. S.T.	0
	M.A.	.5
	M.S.	2.7
	Ed.S.	0
	Other	5.4
Institution Where Student Received Bachelor's Degree	In state institutions	72.6
	Out of state institutions (19 states represented, one foreign country)	27.4
Grade levels of Major Teaching Responsibility	K-3	30.8
	4-6	20.5
	7-12	39.5
	Other	9.3
Future Plans	To remain as a classroom teacher	63.2
	To remain in education in another capacity	10.8
	To leave teaching temporarily	3.2
	To leave teaching	5.9
	Undecided	16.7

TABLE II

PERCEPTIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE TEACHER-EDUCATION PREPARATION

	Variable	Percentages			
		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
1.	To identify and compose instructional objectives for use with students	3.8	11.5	35.0	49.7
2.	To plan instruction designed to achieve your objectives	3.8	12.0	42.6	41.6
3.	To plan instruction according to individual student differences	11.5	25.1	36.1	27.3
4.	To collect and use information about the needs of individual learners	6.6	32.2	35.0	26.2
5.	To recognize learners with special problems and refer them to specialists	10.4	25.7	32.2	31.7
6.	To evaluate your own teaching effectiveness and make curricular revisions when necessary	3.3	24.6	45.9	26.2
7.	To properly select and operate media equipment and material	9.3	17.5	36.6	36.6
8.	To select and use proper questioning techniques with students in the classroom	5.0	20.4	44.8	29.8
9.	To use oral reinforcement techniques with students	3.8	11.5	35.2	49.5
10.	To use correct language arts techniques with students (including writing, spelling, punctuation, etc).	5.0	13.3	47.8	33.9
11.	To use a variety of teaching methods	1.1	15.8	39.4	43.7
12.	To work with individuals and small groups	1.6	13.7	43.2	41.5
13.	To work with large groups	4.8	13.6	41.6	40.0
14.	To understand and use the subject matter in your area	1.6	10.5	44.5	43.4
15.	To attend to routine classroom tasks	7.7	24.3	39.3	28.7

Variable	Percentages			
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
16. To use instructional time efficiently	3.3	16.9	45.9	33.9
17. To create an attractive and orderly environment	4.4	14.3	37.9	43.4
18. To communicate enthusisam for learning	3.3	8.7	43.7	44.3
19. To assist learners in developing a positive self concept	2.7	16.9	36.1	44.3
20. To manage student classroom behavior	16.6	27.6	34.3	21.5
21. To understand the roles of other educational personnel (including principals, supervisors, counselors, etc.)	13.2	31.9	39.0	15.9
22. To work with parents in the teaching-learning process	15.8	29.5	39.9	14.8
23. To understand the legal responsibilities of teachers	16.4	33.9	29.5	20.2
24. To understand public school organization	15.2	37.2	35.0	12.6
25. To work with students in clarifying and selecting values	8.3	29.3	45.3	17.1

TABLE III

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

Variable	Difference
Undergraduate Grade Point Average	Female > Male
State where Degree was Obtained	Greater percentage of males from states other than Georgia
Grade level of teaching	Males teach higher grades
Future Plans	Greater percentage of females plan to remain in education as a classroom teacher
Satisfaction with preparation to:	
1. Write instructional objectives	Female > Male
2. Create an attractive and orderly environment	Female > Male

TABLE IV

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

Variable	Difference
State where Degree was Obtained	Greater percentage of Blacks from states other than Georgia
Future Plans	Greater percentage of whites plan to remain in education as a classroom teacher.
Satisfied with Preparation to:	
1. Work with individuals and small groups	Black > White
2. Work with large groups	Black > White
3. Manage student classroom behavior	Black > White

TABLE V

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS CATEGORIZED ACCORDING TO AGE

Variable	Difference
Graduate Grade Point Average	31-35 > 22-25
Satisfied with Preparation to:	
1. Identify and compose instructional objectives	22-25 > 26-30
2. Plan instruction designed to achieve your objectives	22-25 > 26-30
3. Use oral reinforcement techniques with students	22-25 > 41 and older, and 31-35
4. Work with parents in the teaching-learning process	22-25 > 26-30
5. Work with students in clarifying and selecting values	22-25 > 26-35

TABLE VI

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF THEIR PATTERN IN ESTABLISHING MAJOR

Variable	Difference
Age	Teachers indicating that they entered as education majors were significantly younger.
Satisfied with Preparation to:	
1. Identify and compose instructional objectives	Entered as Ed. or made only one Change > other patterns
2. Plan instruction designed to achieve your objectives	"
3. Evaluate your own teaching effectiveness and make curricular revisions when necessary	"
4. Select and operate media equipment and material	"
5. Work with individuals and small groups	"
6. Understand and use appropriate subject matter	"
7. Attend to routine classroom tasks	"
8. Communicate enthusiasm for learning	"
9. Assist learners in developing a positive self concept	"
10. Work with students in clarifying and accepting values	"

TABLE VII

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF UNDERGRADUATE GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Variable	Difference
Sex	Females have higher G.P.A.
Satisfied with Preparation to:	
1. Plan instruction according to individual student differences	Higher G.P.A. > Lower G.P.A.
2. Collect and use information about the needs of individual learners	"
3. Recognize learners with special problems and refer them to specialists	"
4. Evaluate own teaching effectiveness	"
5. Work with individuals and small groups	"
6. Use instructional time efficiently	"

TABLE VIII

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR EDUCATION COURSES

Variable	Difference
Undergraduate Grade Point Average	Higher Ed. GPA > Lower Ed. GPA
Graduate Grade Point Average	"
Satisfied with Preparation to:	
1. Recognize learners with special problems	"
2. Use a variety of teaching methods	"
3. Communicate enthusiasm for learning	"
4. Assist learners in developing a positive self concept	Lower Ed. GPA > Higher Ed. GPA

TABLE IX

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF GRADUATE GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Variable	Difference
Age	Higher Grad. GPA > Lower Grad. GPA
Undergraduate GPA	"
Education GPA	"

TABLE X

VARIABLES WHICH INDEPENDENTLY PREDICT FUTURE PLANS OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

Variable	Significance
Major Subject Area	.0003
Degree	.0028
State where Degree was Obtained	.0034
Race	.0263
Undergraduate Grade Point Average	.0438

TABLE XI

VARIABLES WHICH COMBINE TO PREDICT FUTURE PLANS
OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS

Background Variables
Major
Degree
Race
Pattern in Establishing Major
Grade Point Average in Education Courses
Undergraduate Grade Point Average
Sex
Subjects' Assessment of Quality of Preparation to:
Select and use proper questioning techniques
Evaluate teaching effectiveness and make curricular revisions when necessary
Use instructional time efficiently
Understand the roles of other educational personnel
Assist learners in developing a positive self concept
Work with parents in the teaching-learning process
Work with large groups
Work with individuals and small groups
Communicate enthusiasm for learning
Understand and use appropriate subject matter

TABLE XII

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS CLASSIFICATION RESULTS

Group I - Subjects who plan to remain in the education profession

Group II - Subjects who plan to leave the profession or are undecided

Actual Group	No. of Cases	Predicted Group Membership	
		1	2
Group 1	143	124	19
Group 2	43	21	22

Percent of Grouped Cases Correctly Classified - 79%

TABLE XIII

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR THE CATAGORIES SPECIFIED AMONG THE OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Catagory	Percentage of total N
More time in schools (as teachers, aides, etc.)	37%
Procedure for behavior problems and classroom management (also dealing with parents; cross-cultural)	22%
Methodology -- (teaching, planning, media, routine, individualizing, motivating, speaking and assertiveness, diagnosis, measurement and research)	19%
Eliminate or modify assessment of first-year teachers (or conduct evaluation before actual teaching begins)	08%
Greater coursework in areas other than Education	06%
More current and relevant instruction	05%
Raise admission standards	02%
Knowledge of certification requirements in other states (in Georgia for incoming teachers)	01%